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A Historical Survey of the Plant-Based Industry of the Nembe Se: A Springboard for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT.
Plant-based industries, also referred to as agro-based industries, encompass all industries that maintain a direct or indirect connection with agriculture. Beyond the primary production sector, weaving and textile manufacturing constitute significant components of this industry. This study intends to document the history of the Plant-based industry of the Nembe Se from the earliest times to the present day. To address the research questions, the study employed a combination of oral sources, secondary materials, and observational methods of data collection to highlight and explore the various aspects of these industrial sectors. The results of this study reveal the profound environmental influences on the socioeconomic development, activities, systems, and potential of the indigenous Plant-based industry of the Nembe people. The findings also illuminate the mutations and continuities that have resulted from developmental efforts and modernism. The study examines the factors that have militated against the activities of the Nembe indigenous Plant-based industries over time. The implications of this study could be used to promote further investigation into the development of various indigenous industries across Nigeria. Among other contributions, the study presents recommendations for both the indigenes and the government to improve the Plant-based industrial sectors for sustainable development.

Keywords: Nembe; Plant-based Industry; Indigenous Industries; Sustainable Development.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous industries, which chiefly rely on environmental resources, create job opportunities for the rural populace, thereby curbing the incidence of rural-urban migration and alleviating the burden of unemployment (Adeyemo, 2021). Various empirical studies have been conducted to examine the resources of the Nembe Se. These studies have consistently found that the Nembe people, whose homeland is in the central Niger Delta, are endowed with a variety of resources. Despite this abundance, the Plant-based industry has yet to attract sufficient scholarly attention. The implications of this study deserve to be explored further. With such a promising foundation, one might envisage a Nigeria with an unstoppable industrial future. Comparatively, however, Nigeria has lost almost all of its indigenous industries, leaving very little legacy to be conveyed to future generations.

This study sets out to answer the following questions: How did the environment of Nembe land influence the activities of the Nembe people? What were the Plant-based industrial sectors in which the Nembe people engaged? How were the pre-colonial plant-based industrial sectors organized? How did the activities of the colonial masters reshape the organization of the industry? Has the industry of the Nembe Se witnessed changes and continuities in the post-colonial era? The paper first examines the environment of the Nembe Se and then draws attention to the golden years of the Nembe self-owned Plant-based industries that relied on environmental resources readily available to them.

ENVIRONMENT OF THE NEMBE SE

Economic activities indubitably constitute a crucial part of human endeavor and subsistence. Throughout the ages, humans have struggled to survive within their specific environmental contexts. All economic activities either exert influence on or are influenced by the natural, physical environment and climate (Turner, 2019). The Nembe people, whose home is in the eastern part of the central Niger Delta, are blessed with a variety of resources that have contributed to the development process of the Local Government Areas (LGAs). The resources of Nembeland are classified into land (forest), marine, and crude oil and gas resources. By way of explanation, the environment of the Nembe people dictated their survival, a conclusion that aligns with the ideology of environmental determinism.

The Nembe homeland is situated mainly in the Niger Delta, Africa's largest delta. Furthermore, it is well-established that Nembe was one of the prominent Niger Delta city-states that dominated the coastline in the pre-colonial era. The name Nembe carries multiple meanings. It refers to the Nembe Se, the Nembe nationality. Nembe is also the name of the dialect spoken in the Eastern part of the central Niger Delta. It is the name of the two principal moieties of the Nembe metropolis, namely, Bassambiri and Ogbolomabiri, which together serve as the headquarters of the Nembe Local Government Area and its council. Over time, the Oluasiri, Okoroma, and Tereke group of communities have increasingly become important members and stakeholders of the Nembe nation. The other major communities in this nation are Okpoama, Twon-Brass, Odioma, and the Cape Farmosa group of communities, all of which are presently in the Brass LGA of Bayelsa State.

Consequently, the Nembe Se of this study comprises the Brass and Nembe LGAs of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. However, Emeritus Professor Alagoa and Professor Okorobia (2011) reported that their closest Ijo siblings, the Akasa (Akaha), do not wish to be identified as Nembe and are therefore not included in the Nembe Se. Nevertheless, at the height of their imperial glory, the influence of the Nembe (or Brass) city-state covered virtually the entire Bayelsa and western parts of Rivers State, especially the Odual (Saka) and Kula communities. This was possible because the Nembe people effectively utilized the knowledge gained from their experiences with Europeans. The Nembe nation shares a boundary with the Kalabari in the east, the Ogbia in the north and west, while the Akasa are their south-western coastal neighbors. Their other boundary is the great Atlantic Ocean.

Indeed, Alagoa and Okorobia (2011) reported that the Nembe Se consists of an area of sandy beaches and ridges with luxuriant rainforest vegetation along the coast, followed by an area of tidal creeks and mangrove swamp. The northern swamp is endowed with luxuriant rainforest vegetation, though slightly richer than the former, and originally used dugout canoes as their primary means of transportation and communication before the introduction of river crafts. This makes the geographical features of the Nembe Se remarkable.

There are two well-marked seasons: the rainy season and the dry season. The rainy season usually lasts from April to October, while the dry season starts in November and ends in March. As a result of the continuous rains, the tidal swamps and sandy plains in most towns are muddy and marshy. Apart from the forest, the mangrove swamps contain a wide variety of flora and fauna that serve both tourist and economic purposes (Nwosu, 2022).

The deltaic nature of the environment influences and sometimes dictates the economic experiences of the people. A prime illustration is how the marine resources (rivers, rivulets, creeks, and creeklets) have been plagued by the activities of the petroleum industry. Owing to its relatively underdeveloped structure, the Nembe Se relied mostly on agriculture (fishing and farming), salt making, local craft, and trading.

The effective interplay between the Nembe people and their environment led to their success in building the united Nembe (also called Brass) city-state, which attracted European adventurers to the area from the 15th century AD. A detailed investigation of the early activities of the Nembe people discloses that they were hard bargainers in their transactions during the transatlantic trade. They often used the word “Barasin,” meaning “let go” or “hands-off.” Evidently, this revealed their deep understanding of the complex business environment in which they were operating from the 15th to the 19th century, indicating a determination to resist unfair prices. The white traders came to refer to the people as the “Barasin people,” a term that was finally contracted to “Brass.” Emeritus Professor Alagoa (1964) noted that the name applied originally to the people at their headquarters (Twon-Brass) and to the rivers running through the area.

It is a widely known fact that the Nembe environment has seen several human activities dominating its history. In the early days, it was dominated by fishing, farming, salt making, manufacturing, and trade activities. The Nembe people and their environment have never had a dull moment, nor have they experienced genuine peace. Perhaps this could be traced to the discovery of oil at Oloibiri, the northern boundary between Nembe and Ogbia, in 1956. Furthermore, the area contains the following oil fields: Oluasiri/Soku; Odeama creeks; Belema North; Ekulema 1 and 2; and Total (Chevron). Even the Tore manifold, which controls the flow of oil in the whole of Bayelsa State and some parts of Rivers and Delta States, is located in the Nembe Se. What is true for oil is also true for gas; it is reported that about three-fifths of the natural gas utilized by the Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas project at Bonny in Rivers State was taken from the Oluasiri/Soku gas plant in Oluasiri, Nembe LGA (Okorobia, 1999).

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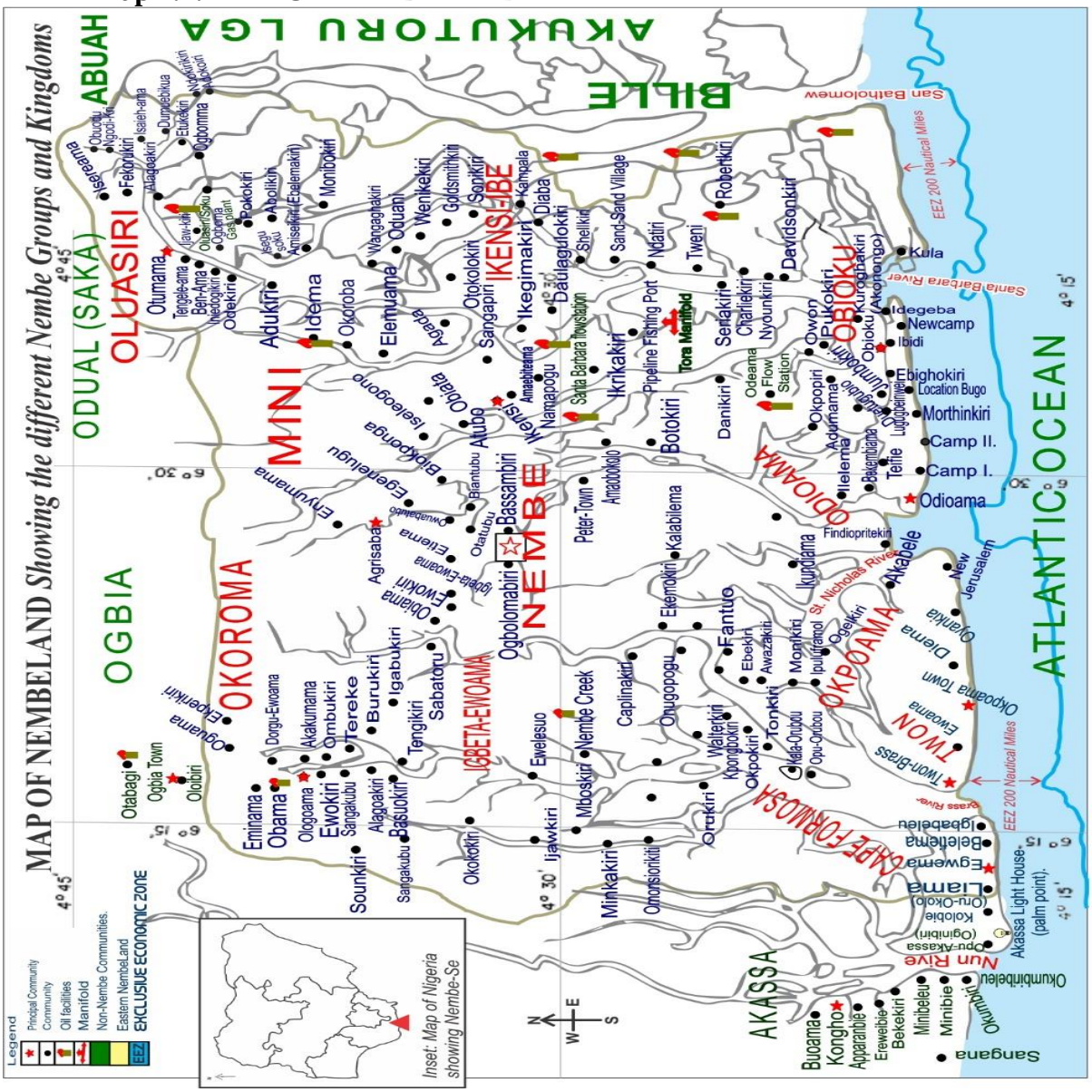
Map 1.1: MAP OF NEMBELAND



Source: Cartography by Prof. A.M. Okorobia, 2014.

PRE-COLONIAL ERA AND THE PLANT-BASED INDUSTRY

Similar to the Daima culture, Nembe provides information regarding the activities of the founding fathers of the metropolis during the time before written records. Professor Gabriel and Professor Jaja (2017) referred to this period as the period of "prehistory." Nevertheless, it is through archaeological findings that we have learned much about the activities of the people in Nembe. Finds similar to bones of several fish species were recovered from sites at Onyoma, Okpoama, and Saikiri Pogu in the Nembe area. These sites have been dated to a period between the ninth and fourteenth centuries AD.

With the exception of fishing, which formed the bedrock of economic activities in Nembeland both in the past and at present, many other people were occupied with activities like hunting, trading, farming, and there was also the existence of indigenous industrial activities, precisely the plant-based industries, among others. Indeed, it is clear from many of Alagoa and Okorobia's (2011) studies on Nembe that the existence of a hut serving as the shrine where the defied spirit of its founder, Obolo, is worshipped by traditionalists preserves the memory of Oboloma Pere, who ruled Oboloma.

From the above statement, one can conclude that the indigenous industry existed long before the arrival of the colonialists in what is now known as Nigeria. It is worth highlighting that not every artifact used by human beings, nor every human who lived in the past, survives for archaeologists to uncover (Connah, 2001). This explains the lack of sufficient archaeological evidence to support the full scope of the sociocultural and economic activities of the Nembe people. A good example is the woodworking activity of the Nembe people.

During the pre-colonial era in Nigeria, as in every other part of the world, agriculture was the most prevalent economic engagement in West Africa (Hopkins, 2020). This period, however, could be traced up to the 20th century. Additionally, the vast majority of the population of the Nembe Se was fully engaged in fishing and agricultural ventures (Prof. Emeritus E.J. Alagoa, personal interview, December 4, 2022). Because of the unavailability of good lands for farming, they fully exploited and continue to exploit the potentials of their natural environment, developing and borrowing skills through acculturation.

According to my Informant, Rev. Numo David (personal interview, November 3, 2022), there were specialist craftsmen and others who took up a particular craft during the unfavorable fishing and farming off-seasons. They relied on the soil-based and animal-based industries, but the Plant-based industry was also significant as they depended greatly on plants for their raw materials. The Plant-based industrial sectors are classified into two categories: the production sector and the weaving and textile sector.

PRODUCTION SECTOR

It is widely known that economies typically shift their focus from the primary sector (extraction of raw materials) through the secondary sector (manufacturing or production) and finally to the tertiary sector (services). In the production sector, numerous objects were made from plants. Among the leading articles were foodstuffs, local soaps, and wood products.

Timber (mahogany), abura, silk cotton tree, kuru, palm tree, and raffia palm abound in the northern part of the Nembe LGA. It is evident that the Nembe people took up lumbering as an occupation for survival, and they remain involved in the business. According to the information provided by Eneni David (personal interview, November 5, 2022), there exists exist two types of trees in Nembeland: sinking trees and floating trees. Trees like timber, kuru, and palm tree fall under the category of sinking trees. In contrast, the silk cotton tree, Ile, and sometimes the abura float. Since the majority of Nembe communities are mangrove forested, they utilized the environmental resources of their neighbors in the northern part of

Nembe, which had earlier belonged to Ogbia and the Saka (Odual). The Eastern and Western Oluasiri was owned by the Odual people. Also, Okoroma, Mini, and Ikensi were owned by the Ogbia.

The Nembe people employed ancient methods to fell trees, particularly the abura and timber. A tree is scrutinized to determine its category. If it is a sinking tree, the Nembe people devise a means to push it down to a nearby community. A floater, *abanya*, which refers to a floating tree, is also employed. *Angala* serves as the premier firewood (Rev. Numo David, personal interview, November 3, 2022; Mr. Eneni David, personal interview, November 5, 2022). Woodworking was greatly supported by the forest resources of the Nembe people. It is reported that carvers made stools, combs, plates, paddles, mortar pestles, garri-turners, working sticks, chairs, door panels, etc. It is believed that this occupation also influenced the sociopolitical and cultural organizations of Nembe. Substantiating this claim, oral evidence indicates that secret societies existing in Nembe communities relied on carvers for musical instruments, such as the *ikisa* (a big drum) of the Sekiapu club. The instrument was beaten with the palm of the hand to convene meetings. The *Okuma* (native drum and sticks), wooden xylophone, *egila* gong, *ekere* (wooden gong), and other forms of wooden drums were also carved by specialists and used for musical occasions (Olu, 1990). The wooden xylophone and *ikisa* are used for calling titles of people, and notable musical instruments are used during funerals, weddings, puberty rites, the enthronement of chiefs, communal labor, the solemnity of cult groups, and other religious functions in Nembe. Indeed, Olu (1990) argued in support of the aforesaid claims, stating: "The men carved knife handles for the great warriors, they also made marks for their great warriors, they also made masks for their great festivals such as Idumangi, a feast in the honor of Amatemesuo, which means town-creating spirits."

However, in the present-day Nembe Se, sawing mangrove trees is now a norm. Conceivably, this is attributable to the over-reliance on the Nembe north for environmental resources. The implication is that trees instrumental to the success of the woodwork industries are going extinct. As earlier stated, the Nembe Se communities are basically mangrove forested, and they, ipso facto, migrated to other communities, used their forest resources to good advantage, and made canoes. Prof. A.M. Okorobia (personal interview, December 4, 2022). revealed that, the drum beat "Arukaragha Nembe" substantiates this position. Indeed, Nembe oral tradition has it that the drum beat, "*angala duba bara duba bara arukaragha Nembe*," translated into English as "however big the mangrove tree (*angala*) is, they do not use it to carve a canoe," is also a slogan with a traditional meaning: "no matter the matter, you cannot downplay a Nembe man."

Additionally, canoe makers from Odioma and Cape Farmosa sometimes went as far as Ondo State, where they had a settlement named after canoe making, "Aru-ogbo," which means canoe center. The Aru-ogbo indigenes are non-indigenes of Ondo. It is a well-known fact that the Aru-ogbo people are Ijaw-speaking. It is germane to note that the Odioma people have good woods in their forest. In spite of that, the quantity of canoes they could make was minimal, a result of the rainforest vegetation in the area. Soku Ibidi-Abadianga (an extension of Odioma)

is also timber forested and was utilized (Prof. A.M. Okorobia, personal interview, December 4,2022).

Due to their advantageous position, the Nembe people toured around mutual communities which played the role of the Good Samaritan. This claim was affirmed by Professor Enemugwem and Mgbowaji (2018), who stated, "based on the existing relationship between the two ethnic groups, Obolo communities willingly leased their forest to the Nembe canoe-carvers without collecting any fee. Therefore, the Nembe canoe-carvers exploited several forests of some Obolo communities like Ataba (Orong, Ikop, Ementian), Ilotombi, Ekede, Ikuru town, Okorontoile." From the stated argument, it is pertinent to conclude that the canoes were sold to the Obolo people and their neighbors.

Despite that, through the process of acculturation, the Obolo people learned the skill of canoe carving. The woodwork industry was a perfect companion to some notable economic activities. It is clear that bones and wooden hooks were used by local fishermen. Again, local spears were made with woods for hunting; sticks were used to club down animals trapped inside pits dug and covered by local hunters. Also, sticks were very important in preparing the spring trap (*fungomó edi*). As a result of the low level of industrial advancement, the painting industry witnessed the use of wood ash (*buro*) and charcoal for painting the masks of spiritual objects (Mr. I.T.E. Williams, personal interview, January 7, 2023). At the same time, sap from the plantain bunch was a permanent dye used for dying clothes.

For salt production, Emeritus Professor Alagoa (1964) reported that the process involved burning the seedlings and the secondary prop-roots of the mangrove tree, collecting the ashes in a container with holes placed on a clay pot, and passing water through the ashes so that liquid could be drained until the water was completely drained; then the clay was broken to extract the salt.

In as much as the interior swamp of Nembeland (Nembe north) is blessed with a plethora of palm trees and raffia palm, the indigenes were to a great extent concerned with the transportation and distribution of local gin. This statement insinuates that there are testimonies to the fact that indigenes from Ibibio and Akwa Ibom harnessed mutual resources for the production of local gin. However, it is important to acknowledge that the Nembe people were, to some degree, involved in the production of local gin. Oral tradition has it that camps were set up in the swamps at places where the raffia and palm trees were in abundance. The *ideru*, or palm wine, is gotten by tapping the flowering cap. Generally, a funnel is affixed to a container and hung on the branches of the raffia tree (Rev. Numo David, personal interview, November 3, 2022; Mr. Eneni David, personal interview, November 5, 2022). No evidence exists to show whether or not some of the palm wine tapped was distilled into alcohol. On that account, it is comprehensible from the foregoing that the palm wine was raw, while the people imported alcohol from neighboring communities, especially from Oluasiri and other Ijaw areas. Supposedly, the imported alcohol was for trade.

It is a well-celebrated fact that every part of the palm tree, from the stem to the leaves to the fruit, is important in the production of a variety of products. The stem is a good source of paper, the leaves a source of broom, and the fruits for palm oil and palm kernel. This conclusion, however, is in accordance with the views of

Professor Okorobia (1999). According to his argument, the people extracted edible palm oil for food and for making a brand of pomade (*Olopulo*). The palm kernels were manually cracked and used as a relish, and sometimes the oil contained in the nut (*izan*) was used for medical purposes. The *izan* is also used for making lotion, which is obtained by heating the endocarps in a pot without water, thereby forcing out the liquid content in the kernel. This lotion is a very good skin treatment and served medicinal purposes, including treatments for smallpox and chickenpox. Lately, it has even been used to treat convulsions. The thorny bunch (*lungi isundu*) that remained after the palm fruit had been extracted was also burnt to ashes and cooked with the residue of palm oil (*pulotugu*) to produce native soap (*obonosen*). Palm fiber left after oil has been extracted from the palm fruit (*kaun*) was also dried and used both as bait for trapping tilapia by fishermen and for lighting at night. Women also removed the veins of the palm leaves and rubbed them against their thighs to produce a kind of thread called *piri-eri* (Olu, 1990).

In addition to plants that served as food, there exist plants that constitute the majority of medicinal functions. The *peri-ekpe* (patches of land of coastal vegetation within the mangrove forests) naturally grows herbs, shrubs, and economic trees, which include trees the Nembe people refer to as bush mango, from which the Ogbono fruit is gotten. In addition, the functions of the different curative plants are well-guarded secrets among traditional medicine practitioners (Rev. Numo David, personal interview, November 3, 2022).

Furthermore, the tapping of raffia palm (*Raphia vinifera* or *Oxytenanthera abyssinica*) was integral to the fishing activities of the Nembe people. In consonance with oral tradition, Nembe communities used fruits of the raffia palm, locally referred to as *imgbesu*, for poisoning fish. All living organisms were intoxicated; most struggled for survival in a confused manner, while others fainted and floated on the water. The commercially important produce of the palm, known as raffia, can be obtained from the leaves of this tree. Among other uses, it is used in weaving, thatching, and hut construction. In the succeeding paragraphs, we will examine these uses (David, 2022).

The traditional thatch-making industry has a gender-neutral industrial job description. Indeed, attributable to the strength the Nembe people possess, they climb and cut down the branches of the raffia palm (bamboo). Eneni (2010) expatiated on the processes: "the branches of the raffia palm are sliced into two different types of materials known in Nembe parlance as '*bara*' and '*ikpisikpi*'. The leaves are broken across the big sticks (*gbasa*), and the small stick (*ikpisikpisi*) is used to bend them together."

It is important to note that, ascribable to the low level of technological development, the thatch industry complemented the building economic activity of the Nembe people. These houses were built through communal effort; moreover, the men dug the mud and transported it to the town where the wooden structure of the wall was fixed. The women used the mud to fill the holes within the sticks tied at intervals. After this, the men roofed the mud houses with thatch. Also, doors were made with bamboo sticks. It should be emphasised that thatches were also used for building fishing hamlet structures. It is evident from observation and information

gathered from oral tradition that the Nembe people built fishing structures with thatches (Mrs. Ebi David, personal interview, November 3,2022).

These thatches were used in constructing the walls and also for roofing. This is also similar to some towns in the Nembe Se. The purposes of thatch housing differ. It is to be noted that apart from accommodation, nowadays, the thatch hut serves as juju houses (*oru-wari*). The bakery was and is also influenced by raw materials from plants. Unquestionably, the baking of plantain cakes and bread production steadily rely on plantain (*Musa paradisiaca*) and the wheat plant (*Triticum aestivum*), respectively. Calabash production in Nembe was also very lucrative. The method of production entails harvesting the mature fruits of the calabash tree. The fruit is kept under the sun for a duration of two to three weeks. Within this period, the evergreen fruit becomes brownish (Mrs. Ebi David, personal interview, November 3,2022). It serves multiple purposes depending on the carver. It could be used as cups, palm wine kegs, among others. It is also painted to suit the taste of the carver.

WEAVING/TEXTILE INDUSTRY

From many studies on the Niger Delta, it is concluded that the history of the textile industry in Nigeria is comparable to the history of clothing as documented in the holy scriptures (Genesis 3:7). As a matter of fact, the early people wore *Osiko*, a kind of cloth made of *piri-eri*, a thread obtained from plantain, banana, and palm leaves (Kriger, 2018). The men used the *osiko* to tie around their waist, while the women tied it around their breast, allowing it to flow down. The weaving activities constituted the weaving of baskets (*kana*), fish rackets (*Indi kana*), fish cards (*Kasa*), and mats.

The women prominently featured in fish card-making. The process of making the fish card involves the skillful utilization of both the prop root (*Ibiga*) of the mangrove tree (*angala*) and card-making rope (*nunu*) to form a round spherical object, which is decked by tiny sticks from the "*Ibiga*" and bound together with the *nunu* to produce the fish card (*Kasa*). Eneni (2010) made clear that the fish card is used for fish, especially smaller fish, to dry or smoke on the rack (*edeni*). The reasons for using the fish card are not far fetched. First, the card facilitates the process of fish preservation by drying or smoking. Secondly, fish cards enhance the counting of fish during commercialization because they are counted in scores (*oto*). Finally, it makes the arrangement of fish in the baskets easier and orderly. On the other hand, the weaving of baskets also forms part of the economic activities of these women. The mechanism of making a basket involves the use of small cane rope (*boru*) or big cane rope (*Iga*). The rope is sliced into the required sizes to facilitate the weaving process. The sizes of the basket vary; some of the baskets, especially the big ones, were used to store fish for commercial purposes and for preservation (Mr. Samson Dinyeyefa, personal interview, November 2, 2022).

The baskets were often used as containers during fishing expeditions. They are used for the storage of some domestic products, such as kitchen utensils. Baskets are also used as containers for any form of farm produce. Just like the fish card, the process of mat weaving involves the skillful utilization of the prop-root (*Ibiga*) of the mangrove tree (*angala*). There are three types of mats in Nembe: *Akpara*

kpa, *Egbeba*, and *Bilai*. *Akpara kpa* is a type of mat from the raffia bamboo pulp, which is used for sleeping, covering articles, and also for burials. *Egbeba* mat is a smaller type of mat. The material is narrower and the weaving is very tight, similar to those used by Northerners. The difference is that the material used for making the *Egbeba* is from bamboo (*angala*). Thus, the *Egbeba* mat is used as an umbrella during rainfall. On the other hand, the *bilai* is a local mat used in fishing. It is noteworthy that the *efenguye* (fan for fire) and other household utensils were mostly woven by women. Again, palm fronds and grass were woven. Some woven materials were in the form of roofing sheets (David, 2022).

It is common knowledge that the indigenous plant-based industry was organized on a small scale. The labor pool for these industries was derived from the family. Workers were unified by ties of kinship. Members of the family (lineage) would conceivably follow the same occupation and share the same workplace. Skills and techniques, on the other hand, were also learned through an apprenticeship system. A son/daughter was trained by his/her own father or mother, and in his/her absence, by an uncle or elder brother. Also, a daughter is trained by her aunt or elder sister. No fees were charged, but the apprentice was obligated to pay through manual labor. It is a remarkable fact that the duration of apprenticeship was not set out and no contract was signed, yet societal standards urged good behavior and dedication from both sides. Initially, a man never trained a boy unrelated to him, but later, boys who were strangers to the lineage were taken. They were often pawned and continued in the service of their master until they were redeemed.

COLONIAL ERA AND THE PLANT-BASED INDUSTRY

The Nembe people established ties with Europeans from the early 16th century, precisely around 1500 AD. From about 1800, eventually after the Napoleonic wars, British trade with Nigeria diversified. Victor's (2016) position attests to the authenticity of the preceding statement, noting that in 1855, Britain’s claim to a West African sphere of influence received global acknowledgement. This feasibly explains why the Nembe people and the British became business associates, as the British became interested in repealing the transatlantic slave trade and establishing in its place the so-called legitimate trade in palm oil, among other raw materials.

Nembe, Nigeria, just like other countries, became part and parcel of the British imperial expansion that concentrated on extracting raw materials and foodstuffs significant to Western industrial development. Dr. Egobueze’s (2019) study reveals that the chief reason for the scramble for Africa and the abolition of the trade in slaves was economic. Furthermore, Europe as a whole could not produce raw materials like cotton, palm oil, groundnuts, and other agricultural crops for its industries because of poor access to wide arable land; thus, Africa became a major source for these raw materials, which stimulated the competition for African territories.

This was workable on the grounds that the British inaugurated new economic policies and programmes to enable them to run the administration of the country. In addition, a further change in the system of the country came after 1928. It should be emphasised that in the meanwhile, direct taxation was declared. In spite of that,

in the succeeding year, the native administration was established with a native treasury. In accordance with Okorobia (1999), it is germane to indicate that for these institutions to function effectively, family house and village heads were co-opted to assist in the process of collecting taxes from their subjects for onward transmission into the native treasury. The inference was that traditional rulers were coerced into serving the interest of the British imperialists instead of the people. The introduction of tax was intended to bring about an increase in palm production, fishing, and trading. This was owing to the fact that more men who were considered taxable now opted for palm cutting, fishing, and trading to meet the tax demand. Presumably, some young men who were involved in trade at that time were compelled to take up Western crafts that were introduced in this era, while others sought paid employment in the colonial government as court clerks and messengers. It should be noted that the trust policy programme was a driving force that provoked mutations in the marketing plan of the British-Nembe people. The supercargo had to trust a considerable amount of manufactured goods to a local trading Chief or persons recommended by him. It was the middleman's turn to trade these goods for slaves, palm oil, kernel, ivory, or food. The implication is that, for the middlemen, it was convenient to be able to take goods without the need for initial capital. Moreover, the white traders also became wedded to the system. It became a way of ensuring a regular supply of produce and further ensured that rival traders did not obtain a footing where an old customer had entrenched himself by giving liberal trust.

With reference to the aforesaid affirmation, it is concluded that the evolution of the oil palm industry in Nigeria during the colonial period must be observed within the agenda of the domination and exploitation of economic imperialism (Umoren, 2020). In all likelihood, at the very beginning of the administration, the direct running of the oil palm industry involved the use of European products like cutlasses, etc., notwithstanding the application of traditional indigenous skills in the processing of palm oil. Reasonably, the 1900s witnessed the direct involvement in the palm oil production industry; inevitably, trading firms have also been blamed for the stagnation or death of indigenous industries, while also being commended for introducing new commodities and increasing dealings in some local communities. Thus, several items began to appear in the import list of Nembe. Imports of goods, especially rice (*orosi*), *ogboroko*, stockfish, and sugar (*osegiri*), increased. Due to the fact that the canoe was a vital means for water transportation, the demand of the Atlantic trade served as an incentive for canoe carving in communities such as Odioma and Odi.

It is widely known that with the increase in imports, a huge proportion of the people's income was spent on European manufactured goods, which displaced locally made goods. This position is in agreement with the assertion of Dr. Egobueze (2019), who reported: "Many of the European nations have gone into production of goods, starting from Britain; thus, back in Europe, it was difficult to sell these finished goods and Africa, thus, provides the safe heaven for the market." Indeed, the locally made gin was declared illegal by the colonial government to pave the way for their own distilled brands, J.J.W. Peters, Hasekam, and Scheidam gin. Though in the 19th century, palm oil was highly sought after by the British for

use as a lubricant for machinery, the drag net (*fungo igbó*), which was said to have been produced from dry plantain/banana leaves (*peri-eri* thread), was replaced with imported nylon during this period. It is pertinent to point out that, initially and towards the middle of the 20th century, palm oil produce exports had reached 45,000 tons with a value of £681,000. Palm kernel followed shortly after; the discovery of its usefulness in producing margarine surpassed the oil itself in overall importance (Martin, 1988).

Besides colonialism, the exploitation of the natural and human resources of the people for the purpose of serving profitable trade in the world market; increased child labor; and the neglecting of indigenous industries due to the fact that the mass production of raw materials, which was to be used in the indigenous industries, became export commodities are all consequences industrialization left on Africa (Rodney, 2018).

PLANT-BASED INDUSTRY IN THE POSTCOLONIAL ERA

The security and peaceful atmosphere created by the Nigerian government during the period it achieved independence in 1960 enhanced peaceful trade between the people of Nembe and their neighbors. It is no news that this period of Nembe history witnessed little attention from the government, as its presence was not strongly felt.

On these grounds, the people depended heavily on forest and water resources. It is a well-known fact that mutations and continuities are important features on which the study of history is based (Igbafe, 2021). Furthermore, certain indigenous Plant-based industrial activities remained the cornerstones of the economy. In accordance with this fact, it is worth bearing in mind that the gathering of bush mango fruits still constituted economic activities which settlers from neighboring communities loved to purchase; attributable to the need for transportation of goods and services moving to and from Nembe, the canoe carving industries were to a great extent patronized; the distillation of and trade in *Khai Khai*; and the weaving/textile industry and trade in guilds were on the increase.

One of the popular events in the post-colonial industry of Nigeria is the civil war of 1967. Certain actions, like the coup d'état of 15th January 1966 that led to the death of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Federal Prime Minister; Chief S.L. Akintola, the Western Premier; and Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto, among other factors, were major factors that gradually served as a build-up to the civil war. Without a doubt, the civil war interlude (1967-1970) engendered restrictions on the economic freedom of the people. Prof. Okorobia's (1999) and Olu's (1990) accounts substantiate this claim. However, amidst the restriction measures which led to inflation aimed at suppressing the economic development of the Nembe people, some resolute men and women continued the business, though trading these locally made products was risky. It must be pointed out that by 1968, the whole area had been cleared of Biafran soldiers, and by 1970, normal economic activities recommenced.

With the creation of Rivers State and the appointment of military Governor, Lt. Comdr. A.P. Diete-Spiff, construction companies and ministries helped to employ men and women of Nembe origin. Thus, due to this, those who worked in the

indigenous industries began to seek white-collar jobs, notwithstanding the fact that the uneducated searched for menial job positions.

Another remarkable event that marked the beginning of a rapid decline in the post-colonial indigenous industrial activities of Nigerian communities is the oil boom. As previously mentioned, the first discovery of oil in commercial quantity in Nigeria was at Oloibiri, at the northern boundary between Nembe and Ogbia in 1956. However, the establishment of the Twon-Brass oil terminal, which was commissioned by Gen. Yakubu Gowon on 21st December 1973, instrumentally influenced the social and economic life of the Nembe people. We will take the socioeconomic impact into consideration in the succeeding paragraphs.

Firstly, it created employment opportunities for unskilled and skilled indigenes. A reliable source noted that the Agip company employed the services of unskilled labourers such as cooks, cleaners, messengers, and other categories of junior staff from the indigenes (HRH. Baratuaipre Ekite Amini, Kaba XI, personal interview, November 7, 2022). This was possible because the Nigerian Agip company had some contracting firms which were its responsibilities.

Secondly, the payment of rent by non-indigenes to local landlords, the building of schools, and the provision of post-primary and post-secondary education were instrumental in boosting the socioeconomic sector.

Following the heavy reliance of the Nigerian economy on oil earnings, the non-oil sectors of the economy witnessed a persistent decline in their contribution to the domestic product. Also, the actions of the oil companies were stumbling blocks to the development of these sectors. The oil sector created the implication that the non-oil sectors (Plant-based industrial sector, among others) were not lucrative. As recorded by Olu (1990) in his study, as a result of this, a large number of the labour force left their occupation to seek positions as messengers, clerks, gardeners, and other categories of junior staff in the oil companies, especially during the establishment of the oil terminal in Brass by Agip. The study further shows that due to the oil boom era, people who thought the era could continue did not save enough money; rather, they lived in luxury. But when depression crept in, they were taken by surprise.

In light of this, the oil boom era witnessed relative disregard of the Plant-based indigenous industrial sectors, such as the production, weaving, and textile sectors of the industries. Therefore, the policies and actions pursued during the oil boom era provided a weak base and unhealthy pattern for future growth (Watts, 2022).

Nigeria has practically involved itself with technology importation in an effort to develop the country. However, most indigenes still refuse to adopt technologies, preferring to stick to obsolete and more strenuous ways of doing things in the industries. Technology has had a great significant impact on various aspects of traditional society, including the socioeconomic life of the indigenes. Furthermore, the plant-based indigenous industries have suffered some changes with the establishment of modern industries in the country and the importation of Western manufactured goods. However, some of the Plant-based industries continued to exist in small groups in different parts of the Nembe Se even after independence but are obviously on the edge of extinction. For instance, the weaving and dye industries were more vigorous in the past than at present, but the textile (clothing)

appears to have resisted the competition from imported clothes more than any other indigenous industry. Nevertheless, it became a mark of prestige to dress in European style and to acquire possessions. Nowadays, modern materials/tools have improved the indigenes' skills. Indeed, modern technology has improved traditional building by providing materials such as cement, paint, modern roofing sheets, etc. The introduction of technology has also helped in processing leaves and roots to convert them into capsules, tablets, and syrup. This has helped in determining the dosage and preventing overdose. These drugs are used in curing ailments, whether simple or chronic. The use of firewood as the only source of energy in cooking is gradually being replaced with stoves, hot plates, gas, among others. Modern technology has provided aluminum pots, spoons, plates, cups, blenders, etc., thereby replacing the calabash, mortar pestles, and the carving of wooden utensils, respectively.

Despite the merits of technology, the Nigerian (Nembe) indigenous industries have access to less than 45% of these advanced systems, due to the scarcity of machinery, high cost of purchase, illiteracy of the workers, lack of maintenance technicians, and inconsistent government policies which are damaging to several areas of life. For instance, with every advancement made in the technological world, it results in a negative impact on the development of these industries. Technological devices consume all the productive hours humans have.

CONCLUSION

The historical experience of the Nembe people reveals a society richly endowed with human and natural resources capable of sustaining economic growth and development. In the pre-colonial era, the people fully harnessed their natural environment through agriculture, fishing, and diverse plant-based industries that provided both livelihood and identity. Production and weaving sectors thrived under family-based apprenticeship systems that transmitted skills across generations and sustained local economies. However, the onset of British imperialism marked a turning point in the economic history of Nembe. Colonial economic policies, including taxation and the trust system, redirected indigenous productivity towards serving imperial interests. The expansion of palm oil production, the introduction of Western goods, and the monetisation of labour gradually weakened traditional industries and displaced local crafts. The colonial economy therefore restructured production patterns, creating dependence on imported goods while eroding indigenous industrial self-sufficiency.

The post-colonial period brought little improvement. Government neglect, coupled with the disruptive effects of the Nigerian Civil War and the later oil boom, deepened the decline of the plant-based industries that once formed the foundation of Nembe's economic life. While new opportunities emerged in white-collar and construction sectors, they failed to replace the communal and self-sustaining economic base of earlier times. Today, modernisation and technological advancement continue to exert mixed influences on Nembe's traditional industries. Although technology holds the potential to transform production and enhance efficiency, limited access to machinery, low literacy levels, poor maintenance culture, and inconsistent government policies have constrained its benefits.

Consequently, many indigenous industries survive only in small clusters and face the risk of extinction.

In essence, the trajectory of Nembe's economic history underscores the need to preserve, document, and revive its plant-based and other indigenous industries as part of Nigeria's broader strategy for sustainable development. Strengthening local craftsmanship, integrating appropriate technologies, and encouraging community participation can help restore the balance between tradition and modernity, ensuring that the legacy of Nembe's industrious past continues to inform and inspire future generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Practitioners in the indigenous industries should learn to adapt to changes, as this would make them open to new ideas on how to manage the industries effectively.
2. The government should offer supportive business conditions by investing, regulating, and granting tax breaks, import duty relief, and tariff protection in consonance with the income tax relief act.
3. Customers' tastes and needs are continually changing. Thus, there is a need for practitioners of the indigenous industrial sectors to develop new or innovative ideas and challenge old ways of thinking to satisfy the customer. Encouraging creativity in indigenous industries can help boost business success.
4. Practitioners of the Plant-based indigenous industries should be encouraged to improve their techniques with modern tools to help them stay competitive in the market by offering unique and attractive products. Nevertheless, their articles should not be wholly subjected to machine production, as this may degrade the quality and throw many employees out of jobs.
5. Members of the public can be encouraged to patronize the indigenous industrial sectors at all times by discouraging the use of imported products which are or can be produced locally. This would bring about a reduction in job losses and boost economic recovery.
6. Educational institutions, like the Universal Basic Education, should develop curricula and extracurricular activities so that this knowledge can be passed on to future generations. It is recommended that primary school learners be taught their local history, as history education is key to preserving history and transmitting cultural economics from one generation to another.

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